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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

April 19, 2004

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1222 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: PREL
Captions: None
Subject: STRONG REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S REMARKS ON GAZA
WITHDRAWAL, RANTISSI ASSASSINATION
Ref: None

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 01222

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: ECON RSO AMB DCM P/M

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
DRAFTED: POL:JFMAYBURY
CLEARED: A/DCM:HOLSIN-WINDECKER ECON:OJ CG:JD

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4035
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001222

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2009
TAGS: [PREL](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: Strong reaction to President's remarks on
Gaza withdrawal, Rantissi assassination

Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, reasons
1.5 (b) and (d).

Ref: State 84066

1. (C) Summary: The response in the UAE to President Bush's April 14 remarks supporting Israel's Gaza withdrawal plan has been stronger and more anti-Administration than what we are used to hearing. The April 17 assassination of HAMAS leader Rantissi ratcheted up the tenor of the criticism, with some of our contacts asserting that the U.S. has given Israel the green light to do what it pleases. There has been no public official UAE response to President Bush's remarks or to the Rantissi assassination. End Summary.

12. (C) President Bush's April 14 declaration in support of Israel's Gaza withdrawal plan, together with the assassinations of HAMAS leaders Shaykh Yassin and Rantissi, have contributed to a build-up of tension and anger among Emiratis and Arab expatriates that our FSNs say they have not seen in many years. Some of our contacts expressed anger and disbelief over what they perceive to be a major departure from past U.S. policy, particularly on the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel. Others faulted Arab leaders for their acquiescence to Israeli actions and for their failure to send a strong message to the US on its Israel policy. Some Arab expatriates speculate that President Bush is trying to influence the Jewish vote in next November's election.

American green light

13. (C) Two Emirati men attending the Abu Dhabi book fair on April 16 told our FSN information specialist that they refused to go to the Embassy's book exhibit and added "everything American" should be banned from the book fair. An Emirati employee at Emirates Media told our FSN information and cultural assistant that it appears President Bush is giving Israeli Prime Minister Sharon "a green light" for aggression in Gaza and on denying the rights of Palestinian refugees. Some of our contacts are afraid that this shift in U.S. policy will cause the entire peace process to go back to square one.

Arab leaders criticized

14. (C) Arab leaders must play a bigger role, but the situation is complicated by the fact that Palestinians are so divided on their tactics, said Awad bin Mohammed Al-Otaiba, an Under Secretary at the Ministry of Electricity and Water and a former Under Secretary with the Ministry of Information. "I don't know if the Palestinians know where they are going. They should understand that Israel is a fact of life" and learn to live in peace with Israelis just as Jordanians and Egyptians do, he told Polchief. "Violence does not get you anywhere," he added. "We Arabs, we like to live in peace, raise our children, and send them to school."

No official response

15. (C) There has been no official UAEG response to President Bush's April 14 remarks backing Israel's Gaza withdrawal plan. Polchief met with Ambassador Ahmed Al-Muqarrab, director of the MFA Department of European, American, and Oceanian Affairs on April 18 to deliver reftel talking points. Al Muqarrab listened carefully then said he would brief Foreign Minister Rashid Abdullah and Under Secretary Abdullah Rashid.

Harsh criticism in the media

16. (U) Reaction in the media to Bush's remarks has been very sharp, including comparisons to the Balfour Declaration. An editorial in "Al Shurooq" magazine notes that President Bush's declaration, "in complete support of Sharon's plan, has gone beyond the redlines that previous administrations have established." The changed policy direction reveals that the U.S. cannot be an honest broker and that U.S. policy is biased toward Israel, according to "Al Shurooq." The publication also asks whether Arab leaders will take a

stand. "Gulf News" challenged Arab leaders "to listen to their people now - and to their consciences - and take a stand against Israel's constant insults and abuses." The same April 19 editorial said it was "time to send a strong message to the US, saying Arab states will not accept humiliation and will not be submissive."

Anti-normalization group statement

17. (U) The UAE Anti-Normalization Committee, a Sharjah-based Emirati organization comprised of Islamic intellectuals, issued a statement April 18 calling on Arab and Islamic leaders to respond to President Bush's declaration "confiscating" the right of return. The statement said that the "Second Balfour Declaration" comes amid "unprecedented Arab and international silence," and warned that "History will not be fair to those who remain silent."

Comment

18. (C) That the UAE leadership has not issued a public statement reacting to President Bush's remarks on the Gaza withdrawal is not unusual. The UAEG's position on the Middle East peace process remains one of encouraging all parties to find peaceful means of achieving a two-state solution.

WAHBA